k: Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

canny, and consisted in an almost animal faculty for following up the tracks of man, camel, horse or sheep, and describing from the tracks the exact type of person or animal that had left its spoor. For instance, it was easy for a Murri, he said, to say whether the tracks of a simple single camel were those of a white camel (*wadha*), or a brown camel (*humra*), or a black camel (*sauda*), and still easier to say if it was male or female, in calf or not.

The Murra skill was so great, contended Shaikh Mutluq, that in following the tracks of a human female a tracker could say whether the person was married or single, and whether she was pregnant or not.

I have myself observed some very remarkable examples of Murra skill, and have been told numberless others by men like H.M. King 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud, who would have no reason to exaggerate. The Murra tribe are related to the 'Ajman, and both claim descent from Yam, the ancestor of the Bani Yam of Najran in North-East Yaman. Possibly their origin is Himyaritic. All three tribes are considered *sharif* tribes, and in appearance are all more or less alike. They have broad foreheads, eyes set wide apart, and chin running into a sharp small point. This is especially the case with the women. The apparently weak chin is, in the case of the man, usually hidden by a finer beard than is common among other Badawin.

The following is a personal experience. In February 1920 I was riding from Hufuf to Ojair in Hasa by a rather more circuitous and southern route than that usually used, as I wanted to examine the nature of certain ground. I had been the guest of Bin Sa'ud in Hufuf for some seventeen days. My escort consisted of twelve of Bin Sa'ud's braves under a youth called Báni. This fine young lad told me that he had just arrived in Hufuf from Riyadh for the first time in his life, and therefore had to depend on others' knowledge of the country. Half way to the coast we met an enormous herd of Murra camels with numerous baby camels slowly grazing in a northerly direction. The country was dune country and we did not see a soul, though no doubt all our movements were being watched by a hundred eyes.

Presently Báni suggested a drink of camel's milk all round. No sooner said than done. A she-camel was easily caught, milked into a panikin of wood (*jiddá*), and we all had a delightful drink. Coffee followed and we sat down for a twenty minutes' rest. Presently a

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

153 small Murra girl appeared from nowhere, aged probably seven or eight, and demanded to know why we milked her father's camel without permission. As we teased her and bandied words, her father suddenly appeared from behind a large sand dune. He approached silently, and coming up to us he gave the usual *salám 'alaikum* and got the usual reply. Without another word he looked us all slowly up and down, then moved up to Báni, our leader. *Kaif int?* he said, *Wa kaif hál al wálid?* (How are you and how is your father?) "Quite well, may God give you peace," was the reply, "but whence know you my father, and how doest thou know I am his son? I have never been in Al 'Ahsa (Hàsa) before, nor do I know you to my knowledge." Without the slightest show of surprise the Murra said quietly, "True, but your father is called Shaja'an, isn't he? I knew him some twenty-five years ago, probably before you were born. But I do not forget a face, and I know you to be his son from your perfect resemblance to him." A truly remarkable feat of memory. The stolid Murra never guessed that he had caused surprise.

I came across a good example of Rashaida memory for country in 1932.

One day I was hunting with Shaikh Ahmad of Kuwait in Sa'udi Arabia, some 150 miles in the interior and in the Qara'a region south of the Musannat ridge. We had been chasing a certain covey of *hubara* in a car for some hour and twenty minutes and had followed up the subsequent kill by pursuing a runaway hawk who was out of hand. Our twists and turns had confused me completely as to direction. The sun was right overhead, and the plain was dead flat as far as the eye could see, without a recognisable feature anywhere, while the grass underfoot was *nassi* everywhere. We had halted for lunch, and I called up the shaikh's chief hunter Nazzal, a Rashidi noted for his knowledge of the desert. "O Nazzal," said I, "Can you tell me where Kuwait lies, and how far off we are?" Without a pause he replied, "There is Kuwait over that bush, and it is exactly five days' journey for a camel-rider taking things easy, and riding about eight or nine hours a day". I called up other Rashaida hunters and they independently all gave the same answer, though I questioned them separately. I then asked Nazzal where the North Star was. Again he pointed to another bush, and said, "Over there, O Abu Sa'ud". Upon this I

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

pulled out my compass, and found he was entirely correct as regards 153 ●
the north point, and by setting my map proved also that he was exactly right as far as the direction of Kuwait went. I was then able easily to fix my position in the wide Qara'a region, and found we were just about 150 miles from home. To me this was rather remarkable, but my companions laughed at me and my surprise, saying the test was not a difficult one, in fact it was no test at all, for they all knew the ground we were standing on almost to a yard, and in proof of their statement they chorused, "Exactly quarter of a mile away from here in a north-westerly direction is a piece of good truffle ground, where we always find truffles during the rainy season". "I'll show you what I mean," said Nazzal, "there should be some there now." He jumped into one of the cars, and drove off at speed. In ten minutes he was back with seven choice truffles. "I thought I was right," he said. "We are close to the place where I found So-and-So's watch, after he had lost it a whole year before. He dropped the watch when we were taking part in a raid." Nazzal then described how the man had dropped the watch as his party were beating a rapid retreat, and remembering the place had visited the spot a year later when the 'Ikhwan danger had gone, and found his watch just near where the truffles grow.

I ask the reader to remember that we were in absolutely flat prairie country covered with a sort of short hay, and with only an occasional bush here and there, and we were 150 miles from the nearest town, namely Kuwait. I thought the incident very remarkable.*

* Other excellent stories of the amazing cleverness of trackers of the Al Murra tribe will be found in Chapter I of *The Arab at Home*, by Dr. Paul Harrison, of the American Arabian Mission, Dutch Reformed Church, all of which I can vouch for.